



Behavioural Activation

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Behavioural Activation is an evidence based intervention for the treatment of low mood or depression, recommended by the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NIHCE, 2009).

This workbook can be used either alone or with the support of your Psychological Wellbeing Practitioner.

How to use this workbook.

Behavioural Activation has four steps. It is important to work through one step at a time, only move on to the next step of Behavioural Activation once you are comfortable with using the previous step. It is key to follow all four steps of Behavioural Activation in sequence. It can take some time for an intervention to become effective and to show improvement. It is important to allow enough time for behavioural activation to be effective.

Evidence of Effectiveness;

<http://psycnet.apa.org/?&fa=main.doiLanding&doi=10.1037/0022-006X.74.4.658>

Helpful Resources;

A Recovery Programme for Depression, by Lovell and Richards cedar.exeter.ac.uk

Behavioural Strategies for Managing Depression www.cci.health.wa.gov.au

Becoming More Active www.primarycare-selfhelp.co.uk

Overcoming Depression and Low Mood, by Chris Williams www.booksonprescription.org.uk

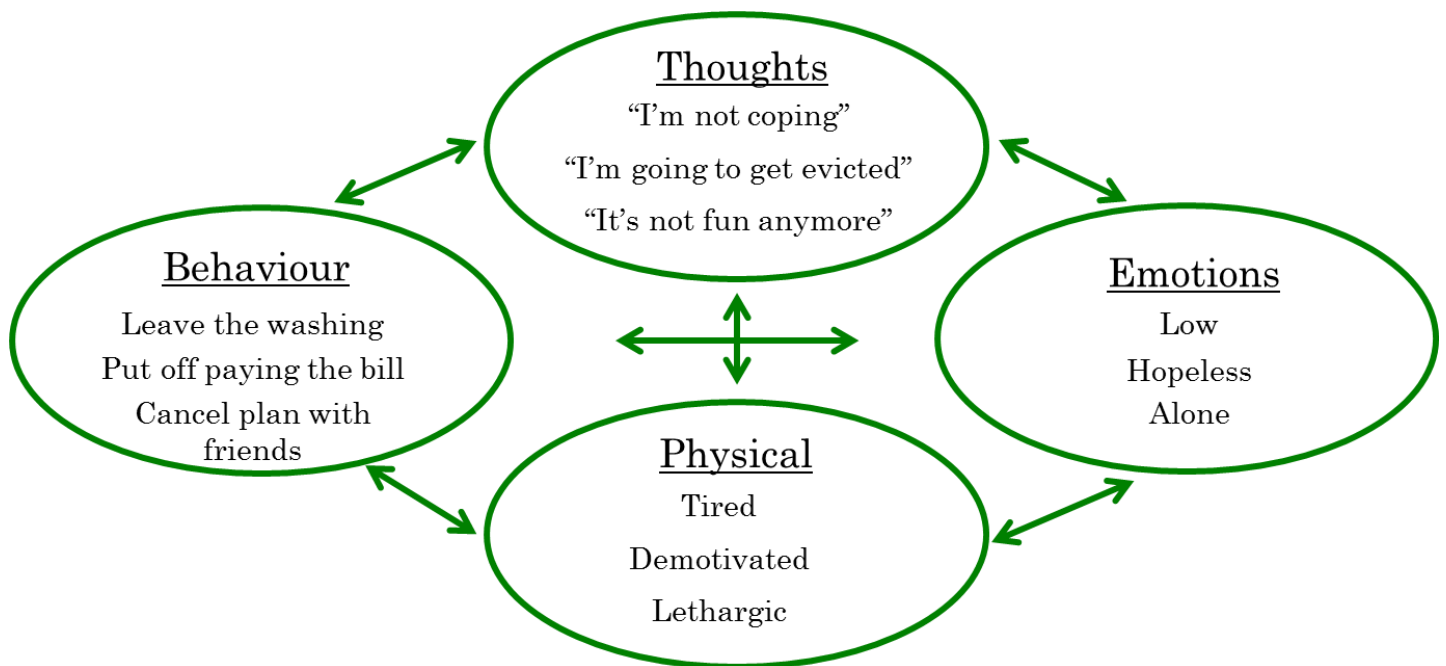
www.talkplus.org.uk

Behavioural Activation

Tackling Withdrawal in Low Mood

Behavioural Activation is an evidence based treatment used to tackle withdrawal from day to day activities in low mood. It works by identifying the activities that we may lack the motivation or interest to do when we are feeling low, or when we find we have little time for ourselves. These activities are then gradually reintroduced to incorporate structure, enjoyment and a sense of achievement back into our daily lives.

When we are feeling low in mood, we may find it difficult to carry out everyday activities and so find ourselves withdrawing and avoiding these activities. For example, we may avoid seeing friends, stop doing the washing and put off paying bills because we lack motivation or find them overwhelming. Initially the pressure could make us feel that avoiding the activity would be a better solution, however, the longer we avoid, the more difficult it becomes to build the routine up again.



The Vicious Cycle of Low Mood

By withdrawing from activities, such as seeing friends, paying bills and household tasks, we lose out on experiencing achievement, connectedness to others and enjoyment. 'The Vicious Cycle of Low Mood' shown above demonstrates how the things that we do or don't do because we feel low may result in maintaining the way we are feeling. Behavioural Activation breaks the vicious cycle by gradually reintroducing activities, which has a positive effect on the way we feel. There are four steps to Behavioural Activation.

STEP ONE

Identifying Activities



The first step of Behavioural Activation is to identify activities that you think you're not doing. These may be things you used to do but no longer find pleasure in, or those that you seem to have little time in your week to do. You can also include activities that you have always wished to do but have never had the motivation to begin.

Activities can be broken up into three separate categories; routine, necessary and pleasurable. Evidence shows that in order to have a healthy balance of mood we should include these three main types of activities as part of our weekly routine.

Routine Activities

Activities that are done day to day to make our lives more comfortable. Such as; washing, housework, preparing food and exercise.

Necessary Activities

Activities that are essential and the longer we leave them the worse the negative consequences. Such as; paying bills, applying for jobs, booking medical appointments.

Pleasurable Activities

Activities that give a sense of achievement or connectedness to others and improve our quality of life. Such as; seeing friends, hobbies, gardening, sports.

When we feel low or lack motivation sometimes it can be difficult for us to recall what we used to do and enjoy before we were feeling this way. Below is a list of example activities which may help to identify the activities you may not be doing. Categorising activities can be very individual so you may find some of the examples fit into different categories for you.

Routine Activities	Necessary Activities	Pleasurable Activities
Washing the dishes	Paying bills	Seeing friends
Eating a healthy meal	Book a Drs appointment	Learning a new skill
Hoovering	Food shopping	Gardening
Washing the car	Taxing the car	Singing in choir
Regular bedtime	Updating CV	Taking a bath
Going to the gym	Book a Dentist appointment	Walking the dog
Doing the laundry	Personal care	Baking a cake

To complete Step 1 use *Worksheet 1*.

Fill in the worksheet with activities you have withdrawn from in the three different categories.

STEP TWO

Ranking Activities



The second step of Behavioural Activation is to rank activities in order of how difficult they would be to carry out currently. Think of which activities would be easiest to do, or most difficult to carry out depending on your mood. Behavioural Activation works best if it is graded, only carry out activities to begin with that you feel are achievable, before moving on to activities that may be more difficult.

Activities are ranked into three separate levels of difficulty; easy, moderate and difficult. These levels of difficulty will be individual to you. It can sometimes be hard to find the time or build up these activities after a long period of withdrawing from them. Therefore it is important to work out which activities are going to be easier for you to carry out first, then you can slowly working towards those activities you may find more difficult. Whilst ranking the activities it is important to include at least one pleasurable, routine and necessary activity in each category to ensure a healthy balance of each is carried out. For example;

Easy Activities

Routine: Mopping the bathroom

Necessary: Find gas bill

Pleasurable: Call a friend

Moderate Activities

Routine: Wash the car

Necessary: Arrange a Dentist appointment

Pleasurable: Go for lunch with a friend

Difficult Activities

Routine: Go to the gym

Necessary: Monthly food shop

It may be difficult initially to think of easier activities to complete, some ideas to help are;

- Ask a friend or family member to help.
- Break larger tasks down into more manageable steps, e.g. Clean the house can be broken down into smaller tasks, such as 'dust the living room for twenty minutes'.
- No activity is too small to start with, e.g. Listen to a voicemail message.
- To start with, maybe aim for completing 10 minutes of a task rather than the whole activity in one go.

To complete Step 2 use *Worksheet 2*.

Fill in the worksheet with activities from *Worksheet 1* into the levels of difficulty, indicate which category of activity they are.

STEP THREE

Scheduling Activities



The third step of Behavioural Activation is planning into a diary the activities identified in steps 1 and 2 as many people find when an activity is planned and scheduled it is more likely that they will actually complete it. By planning a range of activities, from all three categories, we gradually reintroduce routine, a sense of achievement and pleasure back into our daily lives.

Graded.

It can be very difficult to find the motivation to begin carrying out activities after a period of withdrawing from them, therefore it is important to start with activities from the 'Easy Activities' table in Step 2, before moving onto moderate or more difficult activities.

Balanced.

Evidence shows that a balance of different types of activities, routine, necessary and pleasurable, is best for our mood. When planning activities into the diary ensure a mix of the three categories are incorporated so that balance is achieved. For some people it may be that they are not engaging in any pleasurable activities due to feeling all their time is occupied by routine or necessary activities. It may be that the diary can be used to prioritise which activities are most essential and ensure some pleasurable activities are included.

Specific.

The more specific we are when scheduling in activities to complete the more likely it is that we will complete that activity. Therefore the diary used in Step Three is specially designed to enable you to plan these activities into your week in detail, by asking you to include;

What: Be specific about what activity you will be carrying out.

When: The exact time and duration of the chosen activity.

Where: What locations will you be in while carrying out the activity.

Who: Whether you will be alone or with others while completing the activity.

E.g. Clean worktops at 4:30pm in the kitchen by myself.

Fill out your diary.

The final part of Step 3 is to begin filling out a diary sheet, keeping in mind the three conditions above. It is very important not to over fill the diary at the beginning, as the activities you put in the diary should be achievable in your current mood. Throughout the weeks you can start to fill the diary up more as your mood improves.

**To complete Step 3 use *Worksheet 3*.
Fill in the diary following the conditions above.**

STEP FOUR

Implementation & Monitoring



The final step of Behavioural Activation is to complete the activities you have planned into your diary. Monitoring your mood while carrying out activities allows you to see the benefits of increasing activity levels. It is important to be flexible and to increase levels of activity week by week. Reviewing the diary on a weekly basis can help us to highlight our achievements and identify and overcome any obstacles.

Monitor your mood.

Monitoring your mood during Behavioural Activation allows you to see the effect that carrying out these activities can have on your mood. The diary allows space to record the intensity of your mood before and also after carrying out the activity, using a scale of 0-100%.

Being flexible.

Day to day life can throw obstacles into our path unexpectedly, it may be that you cannot complete a planned activity due to such obstacles. It is therefore important to be flexible, activities not completed can be postponed to a later date when you feel it would be more achievable.

Increasing activity levels.

Once you have completed your first week of Behavioural Activation you may find that you wish to begin to add more activities gradually into the diary at your own pace. It is important to remember that this is a gradual process and should not be rushed, it may be that you spend a few weeks completing a small number of easier activities before moving on to those that are more difficult.

Obstacles & Solutions	
Too difficult to start	Try the activity for just 5 minutes
Tasks are too large	Break tasks down further
Lack of energy or motivation	Be time specific instead of task specific
Not enough time	Prioritise and ensure a balance
No improvement in mood	Complete activities in spite of how you feel, not because of how you feel

Kim's story



Kim is a 36 year old working Mum who has struggled with feeling low for the past year. She works full time at a law firm and has a 9 year old son with her husband. Kim finds little time for herself in her busy schedule which has left her feeling stressed and overwhelmed.

Behavioural Activation allowed Kim to recognise that her daily life was filled with routine and necessary activities, and few, if any, pleasurable. Kim began by identifying the activities she felt she no longer had time for and was not doing. It was very difficult for Kim to think of pleasurable activities to add into her life as it had been some time since she had been able to engage in them. Kim spoke with her husband and friends and began to remember what she enjoyed doing in the past and what she always wanted to try. When Kim moved on to step two, ranking activities, she found that almost all the activities would be difficult to carry out currently. It was therefore important that Kim broke down these activities into more manageable steps to make them easier to complete. Kim initially planned one small easy activity into her diary per week where she found she had time. However it would often happen that work or home life got in the way of the activities. Therefore Kim chose to prioritise which routine and necessary activities she would do each day to ensure she had a balance of all activities. Although at first Kim did not find some of the activities pleasurable over time her enjoyment returned and her mood improved. Kim now ensures she maintains a balance of activities throughout her week by using the diary to plan in advance what activities she does each week.

Terry's story

Terry is a 68 year old man who is retired and caring for his wife. Following his retirement Terry stopped attending his social club that he used to regularly enjoy and began putting off day to day tasks. Terry's wife noticed that he was becoming irritable and his energy levels had dropped so suggested he saw his GP for advice.

Terry read through the information on Behavioural Activation and noticed that withdrawing from activities was maintaining the low mood he was experiencing. When identifying activities Terry saw that he had stopped his pleasurable activities and was putting off doing routine and necessary tasks. These tasks were building up and exacerbating the low mood Terry was feeling. When carrying out the tasks booked into his diary Terry found that the easier activities were quite difficult to start as he had little energy. Terry used the Behavioural Activation diary to set himself regular bed times and meal times in order to increase his energy levels. Once Terry felt more able he set himself small specific tasks to complete for a set amount of time. Some of the tasks Terry had been putting off had become quite difficult, so Terry broke them down into manageable steps. This allowed Terry to complete the tasks without becoming too tired and gradually build up his level of activity.

See Terry's example worksheets on the next page.

WORKSHEET ONE

Identifying Activities



Routine Activities

Laundry

Dishes

Make the bed

Cook a healthy dinner

Sweep the patio

Necessary Activities

Pay the gas bill

Book flu jab

Collect pension

Call the plumber

Pleasurable Activities

Social club

Coffee with Bill

See grandchildren

Take wife for a meal

Walk in the park

WORKSHEET TWO

Ranking Activities



Easy Activities	Routine	Necessary	Pleasurable
Make the bed	✓		
Sweep the patio	✓		
Book flu jab		✓	
Coffee with Bill			✓
Walk in the park			✓

Moderate Activities	Routine	Necessary	Pleasurable
See Grandchildren			✓
Dishes	✓		
Laundry	✓		
Collect pension		✓	
Call the plumber		✓	

Difficult Activities	Routine	Necessary	Pleasurable
Social club			✓
Pay the gas bill		✓	
Take wife for a meal			✓
Cook a healthy dinner	✓		

WORKSHEET THREE

Scheduling Activities



Date:	02/10	03/10	04/10	05/10	06/10	07/10	08/10
Morning							
<i>What</i>	Make the bed			Make the bed			
<i>Where</i>	Bedroom			Bedroom			
<i>When</i>	7am			7am			
<i>Who</i>	Myself			Myself			
Mood before:							
Mood after:							
Afternoon							
<i>What</i>							coffee with Bill
<i>Where</i>							Railway café
<i>When</i>							1:00pm
<i>Who</i>							Bill & I
Mood before:							
Mood after:							
Evening							
<i>What</i>							
<i>Where</i>							
<i>When</i>							
<i>Who</i>							
Mood before:							
Mood after:							